

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJECT NATO AEW - ITALIAN POSITION

REF: USNATO 3222 DTG 291830Z MAR 78

1. IT CAN BE ARGUED (AS ITALIANS DO ON EVERY OCCASION) THAT
PRESENT STATE OF ITALIAN ECONOMY IS SUCH AS TO PRECLUDE
EARLY FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE AWACS PROGRAM. HOWEVER, WE ARE
DISTURBED BY REJECTION OF "MORAL COMMITMENT," EXPLICIT
IN LETTER REPORTED REFTTEL, TO MAKE A FAIR CONTRIBUTION IN
LATER STAGES OF THE PROJECT. AS INDICATED IN CATALANO'S
LETTER, THE ITALIAN ARMED FORCES PROMOTIONAL LAWS DO IN
FACT REFLECT THE MODERNIZATION PRIORITIES AS NARROWLY
PERCEIVED BY THE INDIVIDUAL SERVICES. AS A RESULT, THE
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ITALIAN AIR FORCE IN PARTICULAR SEES A THREAT TO THOSE
PRIORITIES IN ANY ITALIAN COMMITMENT TO AWACS, ASSUMING
THAT ITALIAN MONEY FOR AWACS WOULD BE DRAWN FROM FUNDS
APPROPRIATED FOR THE AIR FORCE. IN RELATIVITY, THERE IS LITTLE
OR NO FLEXIBILITY IN THE BASIC ITALIAN DEFENSE BUDGET, AND
THE FUNDS TO BE PROVIDED UNDER THE PROMOTIONAL LAWS ARE
COMMITTED. BUT IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE PROMOTIONAL LAWS

COULD REPRESENT A MODEL FOR APPROACHING ITALIAN PARTICIPATION IN AWACS, REPRESENTING AS THEY DO A COMMITMENT BY PARLIAMENT TO MAKE PHASED ANNUAL APPROPRIATIONS TO THE SERVICES OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS. IT IS AT LEAST CONCEIVABLE, IF NOT LIKELY, THAT THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENT COULD MAKE A SIMILAR COMMITMENT TO AWACS, WITH THE QUALIFICATION THAT PARTICIPATION WOULD COME TOWARD THE END OF THE PROGRAM IF THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY PERMITTED, AND ACCOMPANIED BY A GOOD FAITH APPROPRIATION OF SOME SUM NOW. A TOKEN CONTRIBUTION OF \$1 MILLION EMERGING FROM A NEW PARLIAMENT AND APPROPRIATION WOULD HAVE, IN OUR VIEW, GREATER SYMBOLIC VALUE THAN THE SIMILAR AMOUNT PROMISED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND PRESUMABLY TO COME OUT OF EXISTING APPROPRIATIONS.

2. TAKING AWACS TO THE PARLIAMENT ENTAILS SOME RISK. THE ENSUING DEBATE COULD BE DAMAGING IN SOME RESPECTS--IN THE WORST CASE IT COULD EVEN LEAD TO A PARLIAMENTARY INJUNCTION AGAINST ITALIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM, THOUGH WE CONSIDER THAT HIGHLY UNLIKELY. WHAT IT COULD DO, HOWEVER, IS BACK THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY INTO A FISH-OR-CUT-BAIT PLACE IN THE BOAT. THE PCI HAS ALREADY PRONOUNCED ITSELF AGAINST AWACS AS A "PROVOCATIVE" SYSTEM. THE PCI HAS ALSO PRONOUNCED ITSELF AS FAVORING ITALIAN MEMBERSHIP IN THE ALLIANCE. IN THE PRESENT ATMOSPHERE OF THE MORO KIDNAPPING AND FOLLOWING THE FORMATION OF A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY INCLUDING THE PCI, THE COMMUNISTS ARE TRYING TO PROJECT EVEN CONFIDENTIAL

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MORE ARDENTLY THE IMAGE OF RATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY. THIS COULD BE THE BEST TIME, AND AN ESPECIALLY VALID ISSUE UPON WHICH, TO PRESENT THE PCI WITH A CLEAR-CUT CHOICE.

3. WE ARE NOT AT ALL SANGUINE THAT THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT WOULD BE WILLING TO PRESENT THE QUESTION OF AWACS FINANCING TO ITS TO ITS PARLIAMENT, BUT WE BELIEVE IT IS WORTHWHILE TO MAKE THE CASE FOR IT. WE WOULD PROPOSE THAT THE AMBASSADOR AND OTHER EMBOFFS REITERATE TO SELECTED OFFICIALS THE OBVIOUS MILITARY ADVANTAGES THAT ACCRUE TO THE ALLIANCE (INCLUDING ITALY) FROM THE SYSTEM (A POINT THE ITALIANS HAVE ACCEPTED) AND POINT TO THE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE AWACS PROGRAM AS A COOPERATIVE ALLIED VENTURE, DEMONSTRATIVE OF ALLIED COHESION AND COMMON PURPOSE IN THE FACE OF BURGEONING WARSAW PACT CAPABILITIES (A POINT THE ITALIANS UNDERSTAND). WE WOULD PROPOSE THAT THE AMBASSADOR OFFER (ASSUMING IT CAN BE ARRANGED) TO INVITE KEY MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT (PRESIDENTS OF THE DEFENSE COMMITTEES OF BOTH CHAMBERS, FOR EXAMPLE) TO BRIEFINGS ON THE SYSTEM, HERE OR PERHAPS AT USAF.

4. ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT EXPECT THE APPROACH DESCRIBED

ABOVE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL (WE COULD BE SURPRISED, HOWEVER),
WE ARE PERSUADED THAT WE MUST KEEP THE PRESSURE ON THE
ITALIANS IN THIS MATTER. AS WAS LEARNED IN BURSSELS,
THE ITALIANS ARE QUICK TO INTERPRET LACK OF PRESSURE AS
LACK OF INTEREST. AWACS IS ONE OF MANY ISSUES THE ITALIANS
WISH WOULD SIMPLY GO AWAY. WE CANNOT REMIND THEM TOO
OFTEN THAT THERE ARE OBLIGATIONS TO NATO MEMBERSHIP THAT
INCLUDE PAYING ITALY'S FAIR SHARE OF ALLIANCE-WIDE
PROJECTS. HOLMES

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